

BRING THE intensity

Training with intensity is important to prepare your body to perform better in matches. Why? **NATHAN & GISELLE MARTIN** explain

PREPARED FOR BATTLE: Out-of-competition training at the highest capacity is a key to success for players such as world No.5 Elina Svitolina.

If your maximum effort in training is only a six out of 10, don't expect your body to perform at an optimum level in matches.

Simply put, the intensity that an athlete trains at dictates the level and condition of their bodies.

It doesn't matter which drill or tennis exercises you undertake - if you don't have the capacity to train at a high level of intensity, you limit improvements and results.

HOW DO YOU IMPROVE INTENSITY?

This is a question we hear often. As fitness trainers, we've worked with many top athletes. One thing that always stands out among professional players is that when they're training off court, they push even harder than they would on court. Lleyton Hewitt, Sam Stosur and Martina Navratilova are great examples. They always knew when to bring a high-level of intensity.

Training at high intensity is how players allow their bodies to work equal to and above the thresholds faced during competition.

Through rest and recovery, their bodies adapt and improve, allowing them to push more as they develop. Without this adaptation process, there are often minimal or even no physical gains.

OUT OF COMPETITION

When training out of competition,

the focus should always be preparing for competition and not just training for the sake of it. This is critical, as training is about preparing the body. Serious athletes should aim to set their physical capacity higher than what they need.

Very few players have the capacity to realise their true training intensity capacity on their own, so it is up to coaches and trainers to help them. There are numerous ways to do this, but treating players as individuals is usually the best way to build awareness, intensity and motivation.

RATE OF EXERTION

Athletes should set their own physical benchmarks with

the help of their coaches and trainers. A simple way is using a 'perceived rate of exertion' scale from 1-10 - with level one being the easiest

This scale, with the help of the following questions, can help athletes take responsibility for their intensity in each session.

- ▶ How hard do you feel you pushed yourself today?
- ▶ Do you feel you can work closer to level eight?
- ▶ Can you show me what a level eight looks like for you?

Most players initially have an unrealistic perception on this scale, but this improves with education. They might tell you their intensity level was a seven or an eight, even if you

know it was only a four or five. These definitions change over time, setting new benchmarks as they experience higher intensity levels and their body adapts.

If an athlete cannot train at a high level of intensity regularly at least three times a week, the reality is that progress will be limited. They can still love the game and play great tennis - but if they are targeting a professional or college level, they will struggle to sustain the intensity required for success. **ATM**

TIPS FOR IMPROVING INTENSITY

We incorporate the following strategies into our training sessions to motivate players to raise their intensity:

1. Have them compete against the stopwatch. Give them something to chase, a target.
2. Have them compete against other tennis players when performing tennis drills.
3. Video them, have them watch their performance back and ask them what they think. Then explain what you feel they could do better.
4. Explain the reason, benefit and purpose of each exercise.
5. Remind them of their goals, so it's always in the back of their head when training.
6. Use the perceived rate of exertion scale. Ask the players to rate their own efforts and encourage them to take responsibility for their own intensity level.



STAR TRAINERS

NATHAN AND GISELLE MARTIN, of Tennis Fitness, have been in the health and fitness industry for 20 years. They travelled on the WTA Tour for numerous years and also worked at the Sanchez Casal Tennis Academy in Barcelona, Spain. They've worked with Sam Stosur, Svetlana Kuznetsova, Jennifer Capriati, Arantxa Sanchez Vicario, Monica Seles, Martina Navratilova, Casey Dellacqua and Lleyton Hewitt. For further information and for previous articles, visit tennisfitness.com.